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EMS expands to Pelion after volunteer unit disbanded

By **TIM FLACH**
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Lexington County's ambulance service is spreading out to cover the Pelion area after a volunteer unit that helped out quit.

"We're already stretched so thin that any lost asset is going to hurt," county Emergency Preparedness director Neil Ellis said.

The Pelion Rescue squad disbanded two months ago after 32 years of operation by volunteers.

"Everything pointed to it was time to give it up," said Jack Stone, chairman of the unit.

It's too soon to say if the omission is delaying response to calls in the area, county Emergency Medical Services director Tom Gross said.

Pelion Mayor James Mims hasn't heard complaints or seen any problems associated with the change.

"I'm hoping for service that's as good, if not better, than we had before," he said.

The rescue squad was having trouble recruiting volunteers, particularly a medical adviser, to replace many longtime members retiring because of family and job changes, Stone said.

"Young people didn't want to give up their time," he said. "I can understand that. It's asking for a good bit."

The squad averaged response to 300 calls a year in the southwest corner of the county. It operated on a \$150,000 annual budget, gathered primarily from donations and fund-raisers, Stone said.

"It was a labor of love," State Rep. Elsie Rast Stuart, R-Pelion, said. "They did a lot for our community, but things are changing as our county grows."

The fate of the squad's three ambulances is unsettled.

The unit intends to hang on to its headquarters as both a site to socialize and to hold community gatherings, Stone said.

And there's always a chance that another generation of volunteers will take over the service, he said.

Although he supported the decision to disband, Stone is nostalgic about the thousands of hours of assistance contributed by squad members.

He still listens to emergency calls on law enforcement channels and wonders where vehicles with sirens blaring are headed. "You get it in your blood," Stone said.